

New laser vision correction procedure offered locally

Theda Clark Eye Center first in state to use laser technique

NEENAH — The Theda Clark Eye Center is the first in Wisconsin to offer a new laser vision correction procedure that eliminates many of the complications associated with LASIK, a commonly performed technique to correct vision disorders such as nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism.

Theda Clark officials said the precision of the procedure would allow more patients to undergo LASIK than in the past.

Dr. Michael Vrabec and his partner, Dr. James Syverud, of Valley Eye Associates in Appleton and the Theda Clark Eye Center in Neenah, are the first ophthalmic surgeons to use the IntraLase FS Laser and the accompanying IntraLASIK software. This all-laser technology replaces the mechanical, metal blade keratome or motorized device traditionally used in LASIK vision correction.

LASIK is a two-step process. First, a protective flap on the eye is made, either with the IntraLase laser or a blade. Second, the flap is folded back, exposing

the underlying cornea. An excimer laser reshapes the cornea to correct the patient's vision. The flap is placed back in its original position and heals without sutures or bandages.

While most patients have done well with traditional blade LASIK, Vrabec estimates that 75 percent of all complications are a result of problems from the use of the blade keratome.

However, in the all-laser IntraLASIK approach, the corneal flap is made with the laser instead of a metal blade, creating a smoother surface with a more reliable degree of accuracy. The IntraLase FS laser uses a long laser wavelength that can be focused to a precise point within the cornea.

The laser's software directs the process as the beam passes harmlessly through the outer layers of the cornea until it reaches its exact focal point. There, the beam forms microscopic bubbles of carbon dioxide and water vapor, which cre-

ate a dissection plane and the corneal flap. This degree of accuracy is impossible to obtain with a steel-bladed microkeratome.

The all-laser approach offers surgeons a computer-controlled, minimally invasive technique that safely and reliably creates precise corneal flaps. There is less discomfort and fewer complications than in the blade procedure.

In addition, because of the precision of IntraLase, those who previously did not qualify as good candidates for LASIK because of thin corneas may now be able to undergo the procedure.

The IntraLase laser has been cleared by the federal Food and Drug Administration and became commercially available on a limited basis in 2001.

More than 25,000 procedures have been completed nationwide with no significant complications reported. Vrabec has done at least 50. In addition, he will

use the laser to perform complex corneal surgeries, including corneal transplantation.

"I decided to offer IntraLASIK to our patients because of the unparalleled precision and safety of this new technology," Vrabec said.

"This is how LASIK will be done within the next three to five years."

Advanced technologies such as the all-laser eye surgery usually are more expensive for the surgeon to employ in his practice. However, Vrabec believes

the added level of safety and precision, which results in fewer complications and better outcomes, is actually less expensive in the long term.

The Theda Clark Eye Center, which has four refractive surgeons, has a history of being a leader in laser vision.

The first excimer laser vision correction procedure in Wisconsin was performed at Theda Clark Medical Center more than a decade ago.

Patients with questions about the procedure may call the Theda Clark Eye Center at 920-729-2030.



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